Travis Community Impact Supervision

Outcome Tracking Reporting for Improving Probation Management Strategies

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Summary

The Travis County Community Supervision and Corrections Department (CSCD) in Austin, Texas (adult probation department) has teamed up with *The JFA Institute* in a two-year effort to reengineer the operations of the department to support more effective supervision strategies. The goal is to strengthen probation by using an evidence-based practices (EBP) model.

The Travis County CSCD and the Community Justice Assistance Division of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice have provided funds to support the reengineering effort and use the department as an "incubator" site to develop, test and document organization-wide changes directed at improving assessment, supervision, sanctioning, personnel training and quality control policies. The Travis County CSCD is the fifth largest probation system in Texas and, as such, has a tremendous impact on the state probation system. The total number of offenders under some form of probation supervision in Travis County in FY 2006 (September 1, 2005 thru August 31, 2006) was 22,728.

This is the eighth incubator site report. The prior seven reports have reviewed a variety of key implementation issues and these reports can be found at: http://www.co.travis.tx.us/community_supervision/TCIS_Initiative.asp (the department's web site for the initiative). This report reviews the design of an Outcome Tracking Report (OTR) for the department.

To achieve the reductions in revocations and protection of public safety expected under the TCIS initiative, it is essential to establish a routine outcome reporting system for managers in the department to use as they administer their units. Managers have concentrated in achieving process outcomes, such as filing of Motions to Revoke within the required time or collecting fees, but now they are expected to also implement strategies to reduce revocations and recidivism.

This report reviews the: a) overall design strategy of the OTR; b) source of data for the report; c) variables tracked, and d) the format of the report. Quarterly, all cases terminated from probation in Travis County will be analyzed at the aggregate level by risk classification along seventeen variables. Some of the variables are descriptive and provide a general context of the type of cases terminated (average termination sentence, sentence distribution, age). Other variables are outcomes and measure effectiveness (type of termination, probation term extended). The remainder are process measures designed to shed light on management strategies that may impact success (official actions prior to termination, average days to revocation).

The report will present the variables for the department as a whole and for each of the 11 management units in the department. The goal is for the Director, working with the management team, to routinely monitor the outcomes, identify apparent trends, investigate discrepancies in reporting and discuss issues of concern raised by the report. This process, if properly managed, will produce a new management culture that monitors outcomes, questions effectiveness and continually fine-tunes management practices to achieve better results in reducing recidivism and increasing public safety. Special evaluation studies will also be conducted to supplement the OTR. Finally, the OTR will be supplemented by process monitoring reports (to be reviewed in a forthcoming incubator report).

I. Introduction

The Travis County Community Supervision and Corrections Department (CSCD) in Austin, Texas (adult probation department) has teamed up with *The JFA Institute* in a two-year effort to reengineer the operations of the department to support more effective supervision strategies. The goal is to strengthen probation by using an evidence-based practices (EBP) model. This realignment strategy is called the Travis Community Impact Supervision (TCIS). This name was chosen to purposely distinguish this agency-wide effort from departments in Texas and around the country that have implemented limited components of an evidence-based approach but have not been able to implement or sustain evidence-based principles throughout the organization.

The Travis County CSCD and the Community Justice Assistance Division of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice have provided funds to support the reengineering effort and use the department as an "incubator" site to develop, test and document organization-wide changes directed at improving assessment, supervision, sanctioning, personnel training and quality control policies. The Travis County CSCD is the fifth largest probation system in Texas and, as such, has a tremendous impact on the state probation system. The total number of offenders under some form of probation supervision in Travis County in FY 2006 (September 1, 2005 thru August 31, 2006) was 22,728.

In this effort, *The JFA Institute* provides research, technical assistance in managing organizational changes and documents the efforts working with the department. Dr. Tony Fabelo is directing the project on behalf of *The JFA Institute*. Dr. Geraldine Nagy, the Director of the Travis County probation department, is directing the overall reform effort in conjunction with senior management staff of the department. The effort is supported by Travis County criminal law judges, the district and county attorneys and the Travis County Community Justice Council.

This is the eighth incubator site report. The prior seven reports have reviewed a variety of key implementation issues and these reports can be found at: http://www.co.travis.tx.us/community_supervision/TCIS_Initiative.asp (the department's web site for the initiative). This report reviews the design of an Outcome Tracking Report (OTR) for the department. It reviews the: a) overall design strategy of the OTR; b) source of data for the report; c) the variables tracked, and d) the format of the report.

To achieve the reductions in revocations and protection of public safety expected under the TCIS initiative, it is essential to establish a routine outcome reporting system for managers in the department to use as they administer their units. Managers have concentrated on achieving process outcomes, such as the filing of Motions to Revoke within the required time or collecting fees, but now they are expected to also implement strategies to reduce revocations and recidivism.

Figure 1 shows the overall strategy to monitor outcomes. Quarterly, all cases terminated from probation in Travis County will be analyzed at the aggregate level by risk classification along seventeen variables. Some of the variables are descriptive and provide a general context of the type of cases terminated (average termination sentence, sentence distribution, age). Other variables are outcomes and provide measures of effectiveness (type of termination, probation term extended). The remaining are process

measures designed to shed light on management strategies that may impact success (official actions prior to termination, average days to revocation).

The report will present the variables for the department as a whole and for each of the 11 management units in the department. The goal is for the Director, working with the management team, to routinely monitor the outcomes, identify apparent trends, investigate discrepancies in reporting and discuss issues of concern raised by the reports. The process, if properly managed, will produce a new management culture that monitors outcomes, questions effectiveness and continually fine-tunes management practices to achieve better results in reducing recidivism and increasing public safety. The routine OTR will be supplemented by special studies done to specifically investigate areas of concern, such as the effectiveness of a particular program or the special supervision needs of a particular population. Finally, the OTR will be supplemented by process monitoring reports (to be reviewed in a forthcoming incubator report).

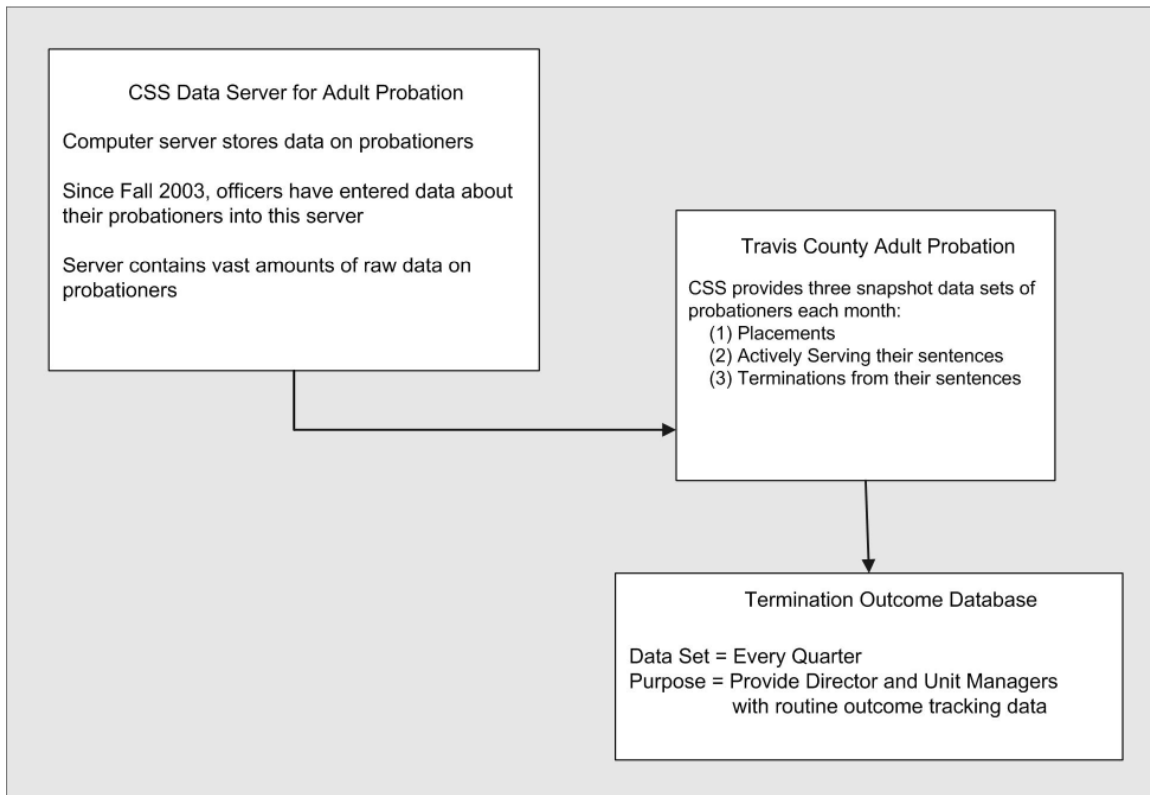**Figure 1: Overview of Outcome Tracking Report Strategy**
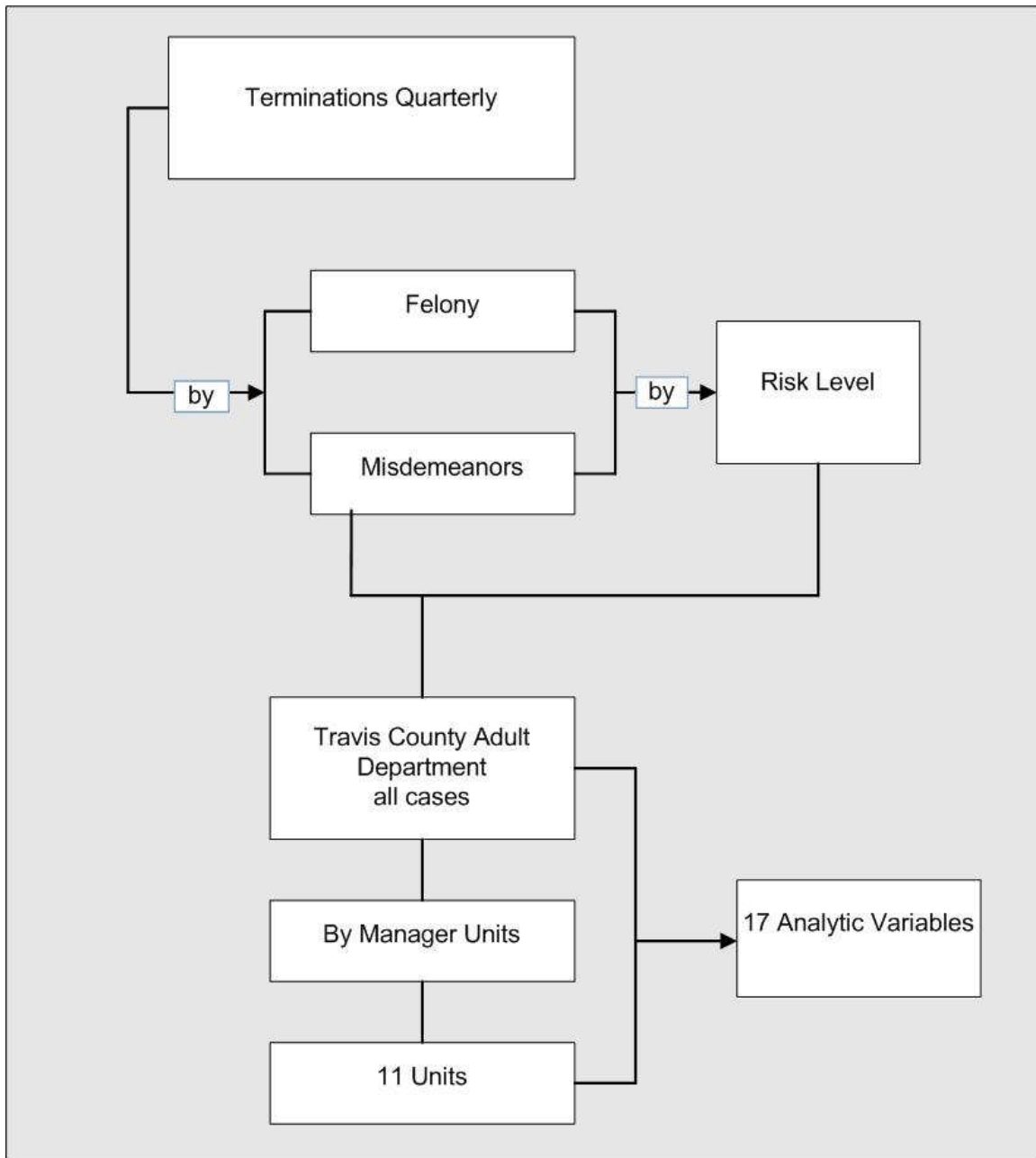
II. Data Sources and Extraction Protocol

A. Source of Data

Data to generate the outcome report comes from information already collected by the department in its management information system. Currently, much of the paperwork in the department is automated. Probation officers complete forms and document case activities online, entering information into an internet server and database system that is maintained by Correctional Software Solutions (CSS), a private vendor contracted by the department. The system is commonly referred to in the department as the CSS system.

Figure 2 illustrates the steps to assemble the OTR from the existing database. Each month CSS provides three automatic dataset snapshots to the department. These snapshots are for: (1) persons newly placed on probation; (2) persons actively serving their probation sentences; and, (3) persons who have been terminated from their probation sentences. The OTR relies on the termination dataset for extracting the data for the report's variables. There is no need for probation officers and managers to input information specifically for the report as the information is extracted from the computerized system through programming routines. These routines have been designed by the department research and information system staff working with *JFA* consultants.

Figure 2: Computer Management System Data Outcome Process

CSS Data Server for Adult Probation

Computer server stores data on probationers

Since Fall 2003, officers have entered data about their probationers into this server

Server contains vast amounts of raw data on probationers

Travis County Adult Probation

CSS provides three snapshot data sets of probationers each month:
(1) Placements
(2) Actively Serving their sentences
(3) Terminations from their sentences

Termination Outcome Database

Data Set = Every Quarter
Purpose = Provide Director and Unit Managers with routine outcome tracking data

B. Data Extraction Protocol

The data extraction protocol retrieves from the CSS termination dataset only the information needed for the outcome tracking report. Research staff analyses the data and makes the appropriate computations to generate the indicators used in the report.

The unit of analysis for the report is a probation case rather than a probationer. Therefore, it might be possible for a probationer to appear more than once in the dataset if he has more than one case that was terminated during the reporting period. However, since the tracking period for the outcome report is four months (one report per quarter), it is the exception, rather than the rule, for a probationer to appear as having two terminations. There is usually not enough time for a probationer to cycle in and out within the four-month reporting period. There are also probationers who are on probation for multiple cases that may be terminated for one case and not another. Again, although this is possible, most probationers are on probation for only one case.

The cases tracked for the analysis are all cases under the direct supervision of Travis County. The data extraction excludes other types of probation cases that appear in the CSS database. For example, probationers with an "indirect reporting status" are removed from the analysis because Travis County is currently not supervising them on a regular basis. A probationer is designated as "indirect" if he has absconded, is reporting by mail, is transferred out of the county or state, is incarcerated in a correctional facility for reasons unrelated to a probation failure, or is deported. Because these probationers are not under "direct" supervision, they are excluded from this outcome report.

Probationers who are "Transfer-In Cases" are also excluded from the analysis. Transfer-In Cases are cases that are under supervision in Travis County but were probated in a different county. Due to the local autonomy of the Texas judicial and probation systems, these cases are still considered to be under the jurisdiction of the original county even if they are being supervised in Travis County. Any termination of these cases, positive or negative, is "counted" against the original county of jurisdiction. Travis County enters these cases into the CSS database, but these cases are "flagged" to differentiate them from cases probated in Travis County. These cases are excluded from the outcome report because Travis County is not ultimately responsible for how they are terminated from their sentences.[1]

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[1] It can be argued that Travis should be accountable for the outcomes of these cases as they are supervised by Travis County probation officers. However, due to state policy and traditions, the state statistical tracking system does not approach this issue in this manner. Therefore, for consistency with the state reporting system the same policy was adopted for the Travis OTR.

III. Report Structure

A. Analytical Levels

Cases for the report are divided according to the probationers' offense classification (felony and misdemeanor) and risk levels based on the risk assessment score at diagnosis (Low, Medium and High). This is done to standardize the cases for analysis along these dimensions. Felonies and misdemeanants differ in the level and type of conditions of supervision. Risk determines the intensity of supervision and the level of tolerance for violations. For example, the expected percentage of cases revoked for technical violations should be higher for high risk felons than for low risk as more interventions to address minor violations are expected short of a revocation for low risk offenders.

Terminations for misdemeanants are tracked as a group, with high risk misdemeanants shown in a different category. Low and medium risk misdemeanants usually serve short sentences and are generally treated the same for supervision purposes. High risk misdemeanants, however, can have longer sentences and present risks that do not differ significantly from some felons.

B. Definition of Analytical Variables

Figure 3 depicts the 17 analytical variables that are presented in the report for felony cases by each risk level, for high-risk misdemeanant cases and for all misdemeanant cases.   Some of the variables are descriptive and provide a general context of the type of cases terminated (average termination sentence, sentence distribution, age). Other variables are outcomes and provide measures of effectiveness (type of termination, probation term extended). The remaining are process measures designed to shed light on management strategies that may impact success (official actions prior to termination, average days to revocation). The specific definition of each variable is listed below.

Figure 3: Depiction of Analytical Variables Included in the Outcome Tracking Report
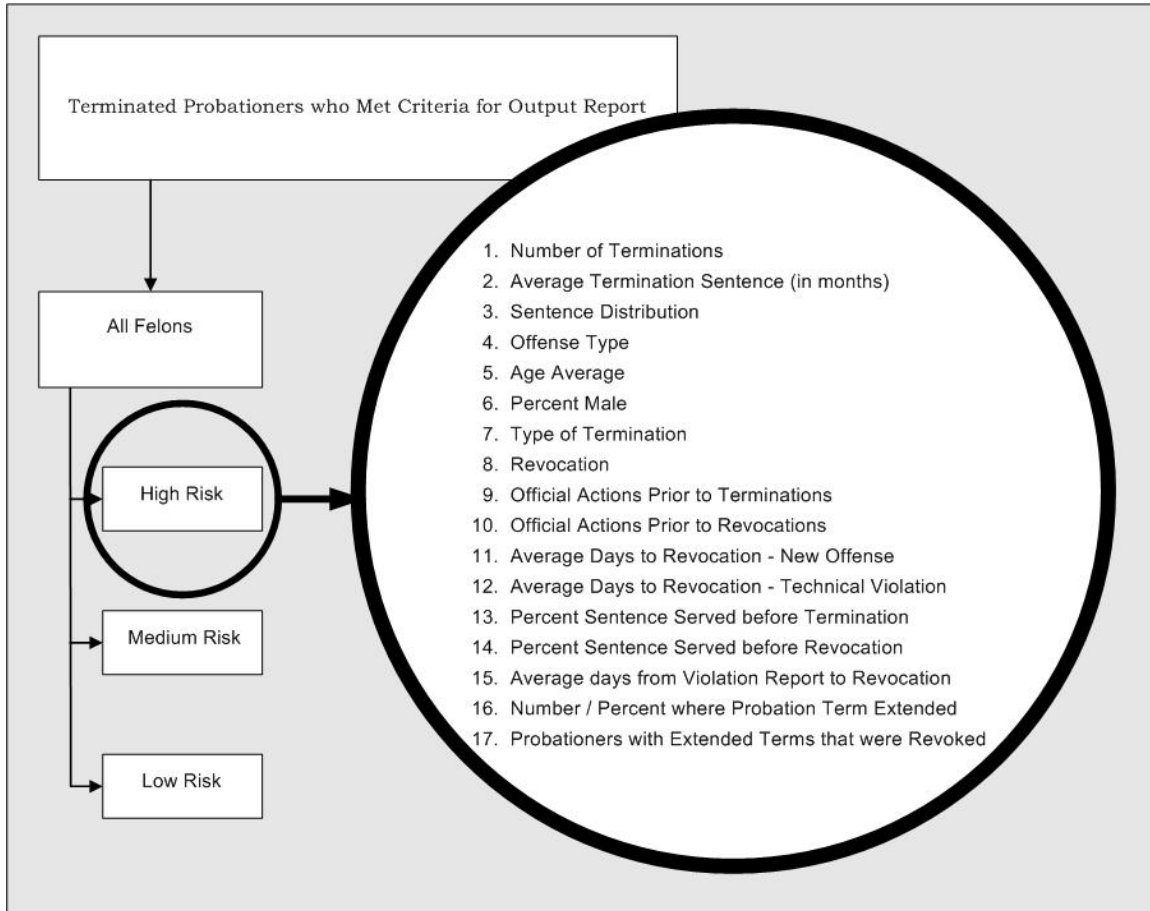
1. **Number of Terminations (Descriptive)**: The number of cases that were "terminated" or taken off their term of probation during the reporting period. There are various types of terminations (see type of termination below)

2. **Average Sentence for All Terminations (Descriptive)**: This figure was calculated by subtracting the date the probationer was put on probation from the discharge date, or the date that represents the probationer's sentence completion date. For those probationers who received an extended sentence, meaning that their sentence was lengthened while they were on probation, the discharge date was altered to reflect this new date. An average for all terminations is then calculated.

3. **Sentence Distribution for All Terminations (Descriptive)**: The sentence distribution shows the number and percentage of cases terminated by sentence length categories (1 to 11 months, 12 to 23 months, etc. up to maximum of 60 months).

4. **Offense Types for All Terminations (Descriptive)**: The offense category refers to the probated offense of record of those terminated. The offense types are categorized as:

- Violent: includes Assault and Robbery charges, as well as charges that involve a probationer intentionally inflicting physical harm on another party.

- DWI: includes charges for Driving under the Influence (DUI) of alcohol or illicit drugs.

- Property: includes charges for Theft offenses, which do not include violence (i.e. Robbery is classified as violent because it involves taking something by force or threat of force).

- Drugs: includes charges for Attempts to Possess, Possession, and Sale of Drugs.

- Other: includes all the charges that did not fall into the four categories above.

5. Average Age at Intake of All Terminations (Descriptive): The average age of all probationers terminating when they began their probation.

6. Percent Male of All Terminations (Descriptive): The percentage of probationers terminated who were male.

7. Type of Termination, Distribution for All Terminations (Descriptive): The type of termination is the classification of why the probationer's sentence ended. The number and percentage of cases terminated by type is presented. Termination types are:

- Discharge: the probationer completed his term successfully.

- Early discharge: the probationer was successful and qualified for early release from his sentence.

- Revocation: the probationer was re-incarcerated for committing a new offense or violating a rule of his probation.

- All others: includes other events, such as an offender passing away.

8. Revocations of All Terminations (Outcome): Number and percentage of all terminations that were for a revocation. This category divides revocations into the following two groups:

- Technical violation: occurs when a probationer violates a rule and/or condition of his/her probation.

- New offense or arrest: occurs when a probationer violates the law and is arrested.

9. Terminations Receiving Key Interventions, Number and Percentage of All Terminations (Process): This field contains three different measures of official probation responses to probationers before a termination.

- Average Number of Supervisory Hearings for All Terminations: Supervisory Hearings often occur when offenders have failed to adhere to the conditions of their probation and/or have committed a Class C Misdemeanor. Supervisory Hearings allow the offender to see a probation officer and the unit manager to discuss treatment alternatives and establish behavioral agreements to prevent a subsequent violation. The unit manager will staff the case with the probation officer prior to the hearing and may ask the probation officer for his recommendations. During the meeting, the unit manager will discuss with the offender the purpose of the hearing and the possible consequences of the present violation.

- Average Number of Administrative Hearings for All Terminations: To allow the offender a last opportunity to comply with his probation conditions before a Motion to Revoke (MTR) is filed, an Administrative Hearing may be conducted. This also provides the District Attorney with information that all avenues to elicit the offender's compliance have been exhausted before a MTR. By agreement with the District Attorney's Office, when the Department files a Violation Report after holding an Administrative Hearing, they will file a Motion to Revoke. An Administrative Hearing will occur with an offender who has failed to adhere to his agreements in a Supervisory Hearing, has continued non-compliance with conditions of supervision, and/or commits a subsequent offense. The probation officer will call the designated hearing support staff to request a date and time for the Administrative Hearing, which occurs in a courtroom. The offender appears in court before the Hearing Examiner to respond to the allegations. The Hearing Examiner may re-negotiate a new contract with time frames for compliance or decide that a MTR should be filed.

- Average Number of Violation Reports for All Terminations: A Violation Report is prepared in response to a subsequent offense and/or administrative violations. Violation Reports for felons are routed to the District Attorney's Office to have a MTR prepared and misdemeanors are routed to the County Attorney's Office for the same purpose.

10. Revocations Receiving Key Interventions, Number and Percentage of All Revocations (Process): As above, but only examining revoked cases instead of all terminations.

- Average Supervisory Hearings: (see corresponding definition in # 9 above)

- Average Administrative Hearings: (see corresponding definition in # 9 above).

- Average Violation Reports: (see corresponding definition in # 9 above).

11. Average Days to Revocation for a New Offense from Date of Probation, All Revocations for New Offenses (Process): This variable focuses on probationers revoked for committing a new offense. It tracks the average number of days that the probationer served of his sentence before he committed the new offense. This figure was calculated by subtracting the probationer's date of probation from the date of the

violation.   This figure is presented in the aggregate for all cases revoked for new offenses.

12. Average Days to Revocation for Technical Violation from Date of Probation, All Revocations for Technical Violations (Process):   This variable focuses on probationers revoked for a technical violation. It tracks the average number of days that the probationer served of his sentence before he committed the technical violation. This figure was calculated by subtracting the probationer's date of probation from the date of the technical violation. This figure is presented in the aggregate for all cases revoked for technical violations.

13. Percent of Sentence Served Before Termination, All Terminations (Outcome): This field examines all probationers that were terminated for events other than a revocation. This percent is calculated by dividing the number of months the probationer served (the date assigned to probation minus the termination date) by the number of months the probationer was supposed to serve for his/her sentence (the date assigned to probation minus the discharge date). An aggregate percentage is presented for all terminations.

14. Percent Sentence Served Before Revocation, All Revocations (Outcome): This field examines all probationers who were terminated for a revocation. This percent is calculated by dividing the number of months the probationer served (the date assigned to probation minus the termination date) by the number of months the probationer was supposed to serve for his sentence (the date assigned to probation minus the discharge date). An aggregate percentage is presented for all revocations.

15.   Average Days from Violation Report to Revocation, All Revocations (Outcome): This field examines all probationers who were revoked.   This field identifies the number of days the probationer spent on probation after the Violation Report was filed. This figure is calculated by identifying the number of days that elapsed from the date the probation officer filed the Violation Report to the date the probationer was actually revoked in court. An aggregate average number of days is presented for all revocations.

16. Probation Extended (Outcome): This field provides the number and percentage of probationers who had their term extended during their sentence.

17. Probationers with Extended Sentences that Were Revoked (Outcome): This variable identifies the number and percentage of probationers with extended sentences who were terminated due to a revocation.

C. OTR Format

Figure 4 presents the actual template for the OTR. The template shown here depicts only two columns for probation units. In the actual report, the columns will begin with a total for the department and then information for each managerial unit will be presented as depicted in the figure.

Figure 4: Template for Outcome Tracking Report

Outcome Tracking Report
Quarterly Report

#	FIELD	Total	Unit 1	Unit 2	Report will contain numbers for all units
1	Number of terminations				
2	Average sentence (months)				
3	Sentence distribution				
	--1 thru 11 months				
	--12 thru 23 months				
	--24 thru 35 months				
	--36 thru 47 months				
	--48 thru 59 months				
	--60 months or more				
4	Offenses				
	--Violence				
	--DWI				
	--Property				
	--Drugs				
	--Other				
5	Age average				
6	Percent male				
7	Type of Termination:				
	--Discharge				
	--Early discharge				
	--Revocation				
	--All other				
8	Revocations:				
	--technical				
	--new offense or arrest				
9	For terminations:				
	--Average superv hearings				
	--Average admin hearing				
	--Average violation reports				
10	For revocations:				
	--Average superv hearings				
	--Average admin hearing				
	--Average violation reports				
11	Average days to revocation for new offense from date of probation				
12	Average days to revocation for technical violation from date of probation				
13	Percent sentence served before termination				
14	Percent sentence served before revocation				
15	Average days from VR to revocation				
16	Number/percent where probation sentence extended prior to termination				
17	Number/percent probationers with extended sentences that were revoked				

The terminations and corresponding analytical variables are sorted out to reflect the cases terminated in each of the department's eleven management units. A management unit consists of one Case Work Manager (CWM) supervising up to 20 probation officers. The manager is responsible for the operation of his unit and reports to field supervisors and the director of the department. Therefore, each manager will have access to their unit's outcome tracking information as well as outcome tracking information for other units and for the department as a whole. Eventually, as trends emerge, baselines will be developed by the department's administrators to determine levels of acceptable outcomes by risk levels for the department and for units.

The OTR will be supplemented as needed by special evaluation reports. For example, detailed information is now being collected on all revocations following a template for data collection developed by the Texas Legislative Budget Board (LBB). The LBB has been conducting detailed studies of revocations in the largest probation departments in the state.[2] As part of their data collection they developed a comprehensive data collection instrument. The department is now using this instrument to routinely collect information on all cases revoked. As needed, the research staff of the department, working with the consultant team, will issue reports examining revocation patterns in-depth. Other special studies will include the evaluation of specific programs or strategies as these evaluations are needed to identify critical issues affecting effectiveness. Finally, the OTR will be supplemented by process monitoring reports (to be reviewed in a forthcoming incubator report).

IV. Conclusion

This report reviewed the design of an Outcome Tracking Report (OTR) for the department. It reviewed the: a) overall design strategy of the OTR; b) source of data for the report; c) the variables tracked, and d) the format of the report.

To achieve the reductions in revocations and protection of public safety expected under the TCIS initiative, it is essential to establish a routine outcome reporting system for managers in the department to use as they administer their units. Managers have concentrated on achieving process outcomes, such as filing of Motions to Revoke within the required time or collecting fees, but now are also expected to implement strategies to reduce revocations and recidivism.

To assist administrators in managing to achieve outcomes, every quarter all cases terminated from probation in Travis County will be analyzed at the aggregate level by risk classification levels along seventeen variables. The report will track the outcomes for the department as a whole and for each of the 11 management units in the department. A management unit consists of one Case Work Manager (CWM) supervising up to 20 probation officers. The manager is responsible for the operation of his unit and reports to field supervisors and the director of the department. Therefore, each manager will have access to their unit's outcome tracking information as well as the outcome tracking information of other units and for the department as a whole. Eventually, as trends emerge, baselines will be developed by the department's administrators to determine levels of acceptable outcomes by risk levels.

The goal is for the director of the department, working with the management team, to routinely monitor the outcomes, identify apparent trends, investigate discrepancies in reporting and discuss issues of concern raised by the reports. The process, if properly managed, will produce a new management culture that monitors outcomes, questions effectiveness and continually fine-tunes management practices to achieve better results in reducing recidivism and increasing public safety. The routine OTR will be supplemented by special studies investigating other areas of concern, such as the effectiveness of a particular program or the special supervision needs of a particular population.

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[2] Legislative Budget Board, State of Texas, September 2006. "Texas Community Supervision Revocation Project: A Profiled of Revoked Felons During September 2005." Austin, Texas